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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Leaders in state need-based aid meet in Atlanta**

*California Student Aid Commission Chair leads student financial aid discussions*

Sacramento, CA (2018) – California continues to lead the way in discussions regarding comprehensive student financial aid, as a lead participant in a multi-state discussion panel held Tuesday, May 22, 2018 in Atlanta. Dr. Lande AJose, Chair of the California Student Aid Commission and Executive Director of the non-profit California Competes, was one of the featured speakers at the Lumina Foundation Strategy Labs Peer Learning Opportunities. The panels were part of an invitation-only event for leaders seeking to identify and pursue solutions aimed at improving postsecondary education attainment.

“Providing for Comprehensive Financial Needs Through State Need-Based Aid and Public Benefits” was the umbrella topic discussed by thought leaders from seven other states. Many states, similar to California, are attempting to navigate the realities faced by students in today’s market for higher education. According to the National College Access Network (NCAN) [white paper](#) released last week, 75% of residential four-year institutions are not affordable to the average Pell Grant recipient.

But, in addition to tuition and fees, Dr. AJose explained that the financial barriers facing today’s California students include:

- Student hunger/food insecurities
- Homelessness/housing insecurities
- Student debt crisis
- Complicated financial aid system

At the Commission, which is the state agency responsible for overseeing the largest state financial aid (Cal Grant) program in the country, there are several initiatives underway to try to identify financial barriers and address them. For example, the Commission has launched the first Student Expenses and Resources Survey to assist in determining the Student Expense Budget (SEB) that the Commission compiles and uses as a baseline to determine certain Cal Grant awards. This survey has not been conducted in over a decade.

“California’s state financial aid program is complicated for students and parents to understand,” Dr. AJose told the attendees. She explained how the Commission hired The Century Foundation, a think tank, to give voice to options for streamlining and making the Cal Grant system of financial aid awards more student friendly. The Commission will discuss the report at its June 21-22, 2018, meeting in Redwood City, California, at the Cañada Community College, June 21-22, 2018. Various options have been presented in “[Expanding Opportunity, Reducing Debt](#)” report prepared by The Century Foundation.

Dr. AJose also explained to the Peer Learning Opportunities gathering that the Commission is currently recommending an increase in the portion of Cal Grants that covers the cost of attendance in order to take a step toward combatting food and housing insecurities and reducing the debt burden on students.

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